

VZCZCXRO0507
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHJL #0269/01 1221008
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 021008Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY BANJUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6622
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000269

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/02/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KMCA](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: INDEPENDENT STILL SHUT; GM DETAILS
PRISON ABUSE

REF: A. A. BANJUL 193
[1](#)B. B. BANJUL 203 C. BANJUL 249

BANJUL 00000269 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The General Manager of the journal, "The Independent", Madi Ceesay, met with DCM and Poloff on April 27 to advise us of the ongoing closure of the journal by the GOTG and to make us aware of the torture that he and others have experienced while in detention. Ceesay was detained from March 27 to April 20 along with Musa Saidykhan, Editor-in-Chief of the journal. Lamin Fatty, a reporter for the journal remains in detention. Ceesay provided photos of his back, bearing scars that he reports came from beatings with cables and branches. He was released on April 20 on bond, although he has not been charged with any crime. He does not wish this information to be made public at this time. As of May 2, the newspaper remains closed. Embassy will continue to press GOTG to permit "The Independent" to resume publication as well as to ensure that abuse of detainees is halted and those responsible brought to account.
END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Ceesay, along with Editor-in-Chief Musa Saidykhan, was arrested and the offices of his newspaper were closed by security forces on March 27 (ref A). Ceesay and Saidykhan were both released on April 20 under the impression that they could resume publishing. However, when they attempted to re-start operations police took over their offices and ordered everyone to leave the premises. Ceesay has pressed various officials to be allowed to resume publication. At this point, he is not clear on what unit of the GOTG is blocking the reopening of the journal. NOTE: Ambassador has raised the state of "The Independent" and its detained personnel with senior GOTG officials on various occasions and will continue to do so. Most recently, on April 27, Ambassador raised this issue with Interior Minister Baboucarr Jatta, urging that authorities permit the journal's prompt resumption of publication and ensure due process for detained journalist Lamin Fatty. Jatta responded "I have your message and will look into this", but would not elaborate. END NOTE.

[1](#)3. (C) Regarding his experience while in detention, Ceesay reported that his first few days of detention were spent incommunicado at the Banjul police station. He was then transferred with Mr. Saidykhan to the detention cells at the National Intelligence Agency (NIA). While being held at NIA, Ceesay and Saidykhan were awakened in the middle of the night on two occasions, brought to a back area of the NIA compound, stripped and beaten with cables and thorny branches. Ceesay also reported being shocked or stunned with an electric device. He reported that Saidykhan's arm was broken when he tried to escape the beatings. Regarding the motives behind

the detentions and beatings, Ceessay reports that during the beatings he was constantly asked "Who was your source?" in relation to a March 24 article in the "Independent" that listed the names of persons detained in the aftermath of the aborted coup of March 21. Lamin Fatty, who remains in detention was the author of that article.

¶4. (C) According to Ceessay, a group of military officials carried out the late-night beatings under the command of Army 2nd Lieutenant Musa Jammeh, who is currently assigned to the Presidential Guard. Ceessay reported that the security staff at NIA were very upset by the beatings. After Lt. Jammeh's team would leave, the security guards would help Ceessay and Saidykhan dress their wounds and were visibly shaken by what was happening. Ceessay further reported that the security guards would always document the arrival of Lt. Jammeh's team and call their superiors on the phone to report what was happening. NOTE: 2nd Lt. Jammeh (not a known relation to the President) is well-known to Embassy sources. According to other reliable sources, Lt. Jammeh serves on the President's security detail and has a reputation for cruelty. END NOTE.

¶5. (C) In separate conversation with Ambassador, Ceessay indicated that authorities' action against "The Independent" and its personnel may have been in response to the journal's publication - erroneously - of the name of one alleged detainee in particular, former Interior Minister Samba Bah; the paper subsequently retracted, with apology, its publication of Bah's name among detainees. COMMENT. Given what appears to be President Jammeh's determination to ferret out all those connected in any way to the failed plot, it may well be that authorities suspected the journal of having secret sources in the security apparatus providing

SIPDIS
information -- not always correct -- on detainees and were determined to flush out that source. The journal's hard-line opposition to Jammeh may also have been a factor in the

BANJUL 00000269 002.2 OF 002

GOTG's crackdown on the paper. We note, in this respect, that the country's other privately owned journals have also publicized names of detainees, but have been allowed to continue publishing. END COMMENT.

¶6. (C) "The Independent" remains closed and under guard, and Ceessay continues to press for its opening. He is not sure what his future plans are, but if "The Independent" is not allowed to reopen, he will continue on with his responsibilities as President of the Gambia Press Union (GPU). At this time he is telling those who ask, including reporters, that he was not mistreated while in detention, because he has been threatened with re-arrest if he does not keep silent. Aside from Saidykhan and Fatty, Ceessay did not see the other detainees, most of whom are believed to be in detention at a separate facility, Mile Two Prison. He did report hearing what he judged to be screams of other detainees being beaten at night.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: As previously reported (ref C), claims of torture of detainees surfaced promptly after the coup plot was thwarted March 21, and Ceessay's account serves to document specific victims of such abuse. We will continue to press the GOTG to ensure that abuses are halted and those responsible brought to account. END COMMENT.
STAFFORD